



## Ashland's public art gaining 'Velocity'

BY MAUREEN FLANAGAN BATTISTELLA / FOR THE TIDINGS | October 09, 2018

If you were seated at an outside table at downtown Starbucks on Tuesday morning, you had an eyeful of trucks, wooden frames, 30-foot lengths of thick-walled aluminum tubing and a whole lot of fencing. Gordon Huether's "Velocity" is being installed this week along the corridor between Starbucks and Earthly Goods, the walkway between Main Street and the parking and theater plaza above.

"Velocity" is Ashland's latest public art installation and it will be fantastic in scale and playful to see, a serendipitous delight centered in that odd, narrow space. The single curved, metal structure will reach from the top of the stairs, bounce twice and, at the top of the arch before the third bounce, end in a 45-inch diameter lighted sphere. Each bounce point will be fixed in concrete for stability, but that structural detail will be transparent to the viewer. The metal structure has inset LED lights every 4 feet to line the passageway and the colors of the sphere can be programmed in sequence or randomized.

Centered in the corridor, "Velocity" is both whimsical and practical and shows Huether's use of light in linear design and to define secret spaces. The open geometry of the form brings energy and movement to the passageway.

"The scale of the artwork is bigger than anything we've done here in Ashland before," said Michael Morrison, Ashland's Public Works superintendent.

“It’s really long, starting at the top of the stairs and goes all the way down to the sidewalk, so it’s close to 100 feet long.”

The path itself, known as the “Theater Corridor,” is public space but the buildings bordering it are privately owned, creating challenges in considering design ideas. “It had to stay within the corridor and it couldn’t extend onto private property,” noted Morrison. That meant the art couldn’t attach to building walls or foundations and the walls could not be painted to fit into the design concept.

Huether, an artist based in Napa, California, was not unfamiliar with odd spaces and restrictions on the placement of his art. For a 2014 installation in the Raleigh-Durham International Airport baggage claim area, he was told, “You can’t put anything on the floor, hang anything from the ceiling, attach anything to the walls.” Huether’s solution? Life-sized resin figures on tightropes, balancing their luggage as they cross the huge open space. The tightropes were braced against window ledges high in the air, where more figures perch on the ledges.

“Your project, it’s really kind of hard,” Huether said, and he likens the Theater Corridor project to a puzzle, “It pushes your brain into corners where you wouldn’t have gone before; if it’s that obvious and that’s easy, what’s the challenge in that?”

The Ashland Public Arts Commission first identified the Theater Corridor space as appropriate for art in 2014 and has been working since then on proposals, presentations and finally selection.

The Public Art Commission followed every protocol established for public art review with many opportunities for public input and discussion, Huether presenting his ideas three times here in town. Unlike Susan Zoccola’s work for the traffic island near the Ashland Public Library, Heuther’s seemed to generate only good will and amusement.

The Theater Corridor project is budgeted at \$110,000 with funding allocated from the transient occupancy tax paid by visitors staying at lodgings in the city. Sandy Friend, chair of Ashland’s Public Art Commission, says that “Velocity’s” dedication is tentatively scheduled for 4-6 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 7.